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30 January 1985

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Sandinista Propaganda and Disinformation Efforts

Sandinista propaganda efforts have elicited international sympathy for Nicaragua and influenced public opinion against US policy. Nicaragua's propaganda mechanisms include tight control over the domestic media, an international news service, establishment of solidarity organizations, and frequent travel abroad by Sandinista leaders. In 1984, for example, Sandinista officials made several dozen trips abroad, many to Western Europe, seeking support and sympathy for their regime.

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Managua probably gains its best mileage, however, from misleading or false information that frequently receives widespread coverage in the Western media. One priority goal of this Sandinista disinformation is to discredit anti-Sandinista insurgents by accusing them of human rights abuses.

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-- The government falsely claimed in 1983 that the insurgents shot down a MI-8 helicopter carrying some 70 Indian children, and alleged later that year that the contras had kidnapped and killed US Bishop Schlaefffer.

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State Dept. review completed

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-- Honduran military officials deny press reports that they have evidence linking the insurgents to 18 unresolved killings in Honduras and believe the story originated in Managua. The Honduran Human Rights Commission also has said publicly it has no information relating to insurgent involvement in disappearances.

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Managua also targets the US with spurious charges.

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-- In December 1983, the Sandinista press claimed the US used chemical weapons in Grenada.

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-- The regime reported in May 1984 that the US was supplying anti-Sandinista insurgents with drugs, and in June 1984, a Managua radio station broadcast a Health Ministry warning that the US might give bacteriological weapons to the insurgents.

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-- In June Managua said that 60 "selected Somocista mercenaries" took part in joint US-Honduran exercises.

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*Although the most recent Sandinista inspired story about Honduran military claims of contra atrocities appears made of whole cloth, the FDN probably was responsible for some past abuses in Honduras. These were most likely to have occurred in 1983, when FDN comandante Suicida was on his rampage. The FDN executed Suicida for his excesses, most of which took place in Nicaragua.

[redacted] the
Sandinistas accused the US of involvement in political assassinations. [redacted]

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-- The Sandinistas expelled three US Embassy officers in June 1983 after accusing them of plotting to poison Foreign Minister D'Escoto. [redacted]

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-- In August 1983, the government presented to the press two prisoners allegedly involved in a CIA plot to assassinate several high-ranking officials. [redacted]

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-- [redacted]

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-- In recent weeks, the Sandinistas have claimed the US intends to kill Interior Minister Borge. [redacted]

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Nicaragua has also used its propaganda apparatus to discredit and intimidate neighboring countries. [redacted]

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-- According to US Embassy reports, the Sandinista campaign against Costa Rica has included false charges of human rights violations, torture and imprisonment of political prisoners, and participation in joint military exercises with Panama and the US. [redacted]

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-- Managua eagerly exploited allegations by Nobel laureate Adolfo Perez Esquivel--a Sandinista sympathizer--that Honduran troops massacred Miskito Indians early last year. According to the US Embassy, the killings actually resulted from a Sandinista attempt to repatriate the Indians by force. [redacted]

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-- The Sandinistas frequently accuse the Honduran military of joining anti-Sandinista insurgents in cross-border attacks. [redacted]

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We believe that Sandinista disinformation and distortions are generally successful in raising doubts and suspicions about US policy. [redacted]

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-- Few attempts are made in the media to rebut the charges or demand proof. Even if specific accusations strike outside observers as incorrect, the Nicaraguans appear to be achieving their minimum goal of adding to the climate of uncertainty about US actions. [redacted]

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